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NOTES ON ORIENTAL ANTIQUITIES.

VII. TWO STONE TABLETS WITH HIEROGLYPHIC BABYLONIAN WRITING.

[PLATES IV, V.]

Among a number of interesting objects collected in Babylonia by Dr. A. Blau (formerly in the Turkish medical service), and of which he very kindly allowed me to take wax impressions or photographs, were two small, thin specimens of engraved jade-like green stone, perhaps a hard variety of serpentine. They have already been published by me, with wood-cuts, in the *Proceedings of the American Oriental Society* (October, 1885), but their great importance, as giving probably the oldest examples yet known of the Babylonian writing, makes it proper to reproduce them by a photographic process. They are said to have been found near Warka, and they have never suffered from wear, although, owing, perhaps, to the lamination of the stone, a small bit has flaked off from the inscribed side of the larger one: otherwise, the marks of the primitive tooling are perfectly distinct. I have not measurements of these tablets, but they are represented very nearly of the natural size.

The shape of the one first described approaches an oval divided a little below its larger diameter. One side, which I may call the obverse (PL. IV, No. 1), has in the middle a standing beardless figure, with both hands uplifted. He has no headdress or sign of hair, being as bald as the heads from Telloh: the eye is round, and the nose very sharp. He wears a single garment, a skirt reaching nearly to the ankles, apparently transparent, through which the figure is seen: it is covered with cross-hatched lines dividing it into small squares, and is held by a band about the waist, and folded about the body to show the lapping edge, or possibly the cord of the girdle. In front of him are two figures with similar head and profile, but naked, each kneeling on one knee, and holding in the hands what appears as if it might be a large pestle with which they may be grinding corn. Behind him is yet another similar figure, also engaged in the same work, but sitting on a stool (compare figures in a similar position on Babylonian cylinders, *e. g.*, A. J. A., II, p. 46).

On the right-hand side are inscribed several characters. The reverse side (PL. IV, No. 2) presents two human figures. The larger of them stands facing towards the right. He is dressed in a skirt like the principal figure on the obverse, but his features and head-dress are entirely different. He has a prominent hooked nose, a beard which does not at all conceal the features, a band or turban, about the head, which seems to leave the top of the head either bare or covered with a close cap, and the hair hanging in a heavy mass behind. He holds in his hands a stout sceptre-like rod, perhaps phallic. Facing him is a smaller figure, very similar in feature and dress, but with both hands lifted as if in an attitude of respect. The skirt falls scarcely below the knees, lacks the fold or cord at the side, and the delicate lines which indicated the texture in the other case. The scene would appear to represent a worshipper before a deity. The rest of this side is taken up with writing. On the obverse, the surface of the stone is roughly hollowed out around the figures, instead of their being in true relief; but on the reverse and in the other tablet the technique is better.

The other tablet, also flat and thin, is somewhat coffin-shaped. On the obverse (PL. V, No. 1) is seen, in the upper register, a man carrying what is perhaps a ram, though the legs are those of an ox, and it appears to have antlers in place of horns. The man's features, beard, and head-dress make him the exact counterpart of the principal figure on the reverse of the larger tablet, although his skirt is shorter and does not show the limbs under it. In the lower register appears a figure on one knee, almost the exact counterpart of those on the obverse of the larger tablet, but without the prominent nose. The reverse (PL. V, No. 2) is wholly covered with an inscription.

The most remarkable point about the human figures represented on these tablets is, that they seem to indicate two very different races. The superior race has a Jewish nose, and is bearded: the inferior race, including the four in the attitude of servants and one standing figure, have no sign of hair or beard or dress, and have a sharp nose, or a face approaching the ape-like in expression. They are probably not women, but resemble the beardless naked men on the Vulture Column of Tel-loh (De Sarzec, *Découvertes en Chaldée*, pl. III), which are the earliest known specimens of Chaldæan art. The deity (?) on the reverse of the larger tablet (PL. IV, No. 2), holding in his hands the rod, is to be compared with the two bronze deities figured in De Sarzec's *Découvertes en Chaldée*, pl. XXVIII.

But, peculiar and interesting as is the archaic art of these objects, the inscriptions upon them are still more important, as they present to us a type of writing more archaic and more nearly approaching the original hieroglyphics than anything hitherto known. In a letter to me, Professor Hommel speaks of these tablets as in this respect *ausserordentlich wichtig*, and their genuineness, he says, is "beyond question." It will be seen that the inscriptions are divided into short vertical lines, each containing from one to three characters, and that these are to be read downward, as in Chinese. This agrees with what was already known, that the earlier upright forms of the hieroglyphic characters have been turned over on their side in the ordinary writing: Dr. Hommel calls my attention especially to the bird with wings and feet, in the second upper column from the right end of the reverse of the larger tablet, as giving the long-sought groundform for *nam*, which also has the signification of *bird*. For the oldest form previously known, see Amiaud, *Tableau comparé*, No. 28. Dr. Hommel says, also, that the dots, or circles, are numerals, each dot standing for *ten*; and that the whole is a list of offerings. Among the other noticeable hieroglyphic pictures may be mentioned (under the bird already spoken of) a human head, and in the same column a plow; also, a fish, a hand, a fortification, and serpents. On the reverse of the smaller tablet we find, in the first register on the left, a jug and a plow; in the second, an altar, what looks like a bird's wing on a pole, a hand and two arrows; in the third, two fish; in the fourth, a palm-tree.

WILLIAM HAYES WARD.



PL. IV, No. 2.

PL. V, No. 2.

REVERSE.



PL. IV, No. 1.

PL. V, No. 1.

OVERSE.